

Proper 6, Year A, June 14, 2020, Sending you out like sheep<sup>1</sup>

Keep us O Lord, your household the Church, in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace, we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. AMEN

Today's collect has three themes which are relevant to what we are facing in our lives as Christians today. The first one is asking the Lord to keep his household, the church, us, in his steadfast faith and love. The second one is "through God's grace may we proclaim his truth with boldness, a theme which we have been exploring all year long; and thirdly: for us to minister his justice with compassion for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ. It is somewhat unusual to find themes in the collect but we will also find plenty of evidence in

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 19:2-8  
Psalm 100  
Romans 5:1-8  
Matthew 9:35-10:23

our readings, for today's collect and in Scripture in general, for these themes. I remind you that our readings come from a Sunday Lectionary which prescribes the readings for each Sunday. We preach on what we find in the lectionary each Sunday and often its message is astonishing relevant.

We ask God to keep his household, the church, in his steadfast faith and love. The phraseology that we are part of God's household because we are part of the church is a beautiful image that tells us how God looks at us; as members of his household, as children in his kingdom, as precious people, valued as we value our own family. I think of my sister who is coming a week from today to take care of me during recovery from a hip replacement on Tuesday the 23<sup>rd</sup>. She will be here for two weeks. I think of all of you who blessed me with visits, cards, flowers when I had back surgery last year. I think of the many things you do when you work for Family Promise, take care of each other, and work for the good of the church. This is God working through his household to dispense God's steadfast love and faith. This is working for the good of God's family.

As we have confronted COVID19, many of you have worked hard to keep the church going so that through God's grace we may continue to proclaim God's truth with boldness. Under the stellar leadership of our Rector and Vestry we have reached out to people who may not know that faith in God, working for God's glory and worshipping God would make their lives better and leads to eternal life. It's our job, the church's job to tell others about God's love and care for them. May God continue to give us the strength and wisdom to show the way to God's truth and light in Jesus.

The third part of this collect is for us to minister God's justice with compassion. In light of an event leading to a terrible death, rioting, and the outpouring of great anger on the part of our black brothers and sisters, the mission of ministering God's justice with compassion becomes an overwhelming idea. Yet WITH GOD'S HELP we can be a part of the healing we need in this country now. How? I don't know yet, but we need to engage in serious conversation and plan actions which will lead to healing.

Our readings contribute to our understanding of what we need to do. The Israelites had journeyed from Rephidim to the wilderness of

the Sinai and camped in front of a mountain. Moses went up to meet God. God reminded Moses of what had happened in Egypt and how God carried the Israelites on eagles' wings and brought them to him. You know those eagles' wings? The ones that bear us up on the breath of dawn, and hold us in the palm of God's hand.

On a journey from slavery in Egypt or wherever, to freedom is a journey fraught with confusion, misdirection, and obstacles. So, God is laying out some terms to the Israelites. God wants the people to listen obediently to what he requires and he tells them they are a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, his household. All of which we are, too. The people's response is "Everything God says, we will do." This is God's will for us, to do everything God says. But as we know from the progress of their journey, they did not keep their pledge. And we know from our own journeys how easy it is to say we will and then we don't. A journey from slavery to freedom is fraught with confusion, misdirection, and obstacles. Even some Israelites complained they should have stayed in Egypt; at least there they had cucumbers and cantaloupe to eat. There were those in the crowd, who wanted to worship idols, an idea anathema to Monotheism.

There were other forms of rebellion which Moses had to quell. It took them 40 years to make the journey and no one from the original freedom seekers lived to see the end of the journey by God's command.

These are very powerful readings and very relevant to our current circumstances. It is especially relevant to the events following the murder of George Floyd, events that dismayed us, resulting in destruction and mayhem. There were also peaceful demonstrations and marches in which people tried to tell us of the difficulty of being black in America. The question is: are we going to take them seriously, do we really believe in our Baptismal Covenant which asks us: "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being? Our answer is "I will, with God's help." (BCP, p. 305 and the question right above it: "Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?" And again, our answer is: "I will with God's help." (ibid.)

Examining our own views can be a first start. Do we harbor unloving views of people based solely on the color of their skin, their religion, or ethnic origin? Do we distrust people based on the color of their

skin? Why aren't there any black congregants here? We could ask ourselves these questions and others like them. Opening our eyes to the reality of black lives is essential to wiping out racism. Human slavery had been going on for thousands of years and continues today as Gail South will quickly tell you. We are directed through God's command "

to love your God and do justice" in Hosea 12:6 and in Amos 5:24 God says: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-rolling stream." To say that we were not ready for these events that have occurred over the last two weeks is true. But perhaps we should have been. As it says in Romans, God doesn't wait for us to get ready, he didn't wait for us to get ready for his son's coming. What happens, happens. Maybe we should have been more alert to the pain in our brothers and sisters.

Matthew's gospel recognizes the need for us to be ready to use the power God gave us. The disciples were instructed to use the power Jesus gave them. "Go to the lost, confused people right in the neighborhood. Tell them the kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables. Kick out the demons.

You have been treated generously, so live generously.” ...You don’t need a lot of equipment, be courteous in your greeting...If they welcome you be gentle in your conversation. If they don’t welcome you quietly withdraw” (*The Holy Bible, The Message*: Matt. 5–8).

What would it be like if we decided to spread the word of equal treatment for all of humankind? What would it be like if we spread the message that “God is love and if it isn’t love, it isn’t from God” as our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry says.

So much to think and pray about. So little time.

AMEN